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ABSTRACT

A case study investigated the linguistic and social contexts of an adult Indonesian learner of English as a second language (ESL) in Australia, and how these factors affected his language learning progress. The learner, raised in Indonesia, was a young adult of Chinese descent. The discrepancy between the learner's perceptions of his own language proficiency and his teachers' perceptions and expectations was compounded by his inadequate command of his first language, which was caused by interference from his parents' Chinese and from other languages and dialects spoken within his social network. The learner's language learning strategies were examined through interviews and classroom observation over a six-month period. His preferred modes of learning were determined, and field dependence/independence as a learning factor was investigated. Appropriate teacher interventions and teacher-learner compatibility were addressed. The study concludes with a discussion of the extent to which this learner's problems are representative of learners with similar ethnic and social backgrounds, and of the teacher qualities and teaching styles best suited to this kind of learner. (Author/MSE)

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TRACT

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Title: "What is my problem?" A case study of an adult Indonesian E.S.L. learner in Australia

Debra Hoven

This case study investigates the linguistic and social contexts of an adult Indonesian learner of English-as-a-Second-Language (E.S.L.) in Australia, and how these affect his language acquisition progress.

The learner is a young adult of Chinese descent, though born and raised in Indonesia. As he comes from a wealthy, fairly typical business-oriented, urban-dwelling Chinese family, he was schooled at middle to upper-middle class private schools. Subsequently, he was sent to Australia to improve his English with a view to continuing his education here. Unfortunately, the learner's own perception of his language proficiency and his expectations of rapid improvement are far removed from the perceptions and expectations of his teachers. There are, of course, many reasons for this discrepancy. Among these are the linguistic and cultural differences between the learner's first language, Indonesian, and English. However, these problems are further compounded by the learner's rather inadequate command of his self-professed first language, seemingly due to the constant interference from Chinese which his parents speak, and other languages and dialects spoken within his social network.

The learner's language learning strategies are also examined with respect to teacher intervention and the cultivation of teacher-learner compatibility. The learner was interviewed and observed for a period of six months in English classes with a number of different teachers and in a range of different skill classes. The learner's preferred modes of learning were determined from interviews, questionnaires and observation. Field dependence/independence as a factor in his learning process was also investigated.

The final focus of the study emerges as an examination of this particular learner and to what extent certain of his problems are representative of learners with his kind of ethnic and social background. This focus leads to a discussion of the teacher qualities and teaching styles that might best suit this kind of learner.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Association of Applied Linguistics (8th, University of Sydney, New south Wales, Australia, August 16-21, 1987).

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What is my problem? - An adult Indonesian male learning English as a Second or Third Language

The aim of this paper is to describe how a student failed to learn English that was sufficient or appropriate for his purposes, yet gained certain communicative fluency. It outlines the structural regression he experienced with the correct use of some forms such as the past tense, while at the same time increasing the variety of his vocabulary, often in compensation. Most importantly, this study highlights the contribution of affective and social factors towards this learner's failure, as his numerous avoidance strategies and his social nature combined to fossilize syntactic errors and semantic misrepresentations in his interlanguage.

Introduction

This paper is a summary of the findings of a detailed (six month) study of the language learning problems and strategies of a male Indonesian student of Chinese descent, studying English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) in Australia.

With increasing interest and activity in the direction of marketing fee-paying courses for overseas students at Australian educational institutions, the English language entrance requirements are more frequently being relaxed or waived. This trend is producing the dilemma among E.S.L. teachers, the teaching staff of academic institutions, and the students themselves of how to identify the problems of these students and how to deal with such problems.

As has already been demonstrated quite comprehensively (Samuelowicz, 1987), the problems that arise are not restricted to linguistic ones. My study was based upon the experiences of a single student, but as the study progressed, it became increasingly obvious that the pattern

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emerging could have been transferrable to any number of Indonesian L1 students with whom I had previously been involved in teacher-learner situations.

The information about the student presented here was accumulated from recorded weekly interviews of 10-15 minutes and recorded oral participation in class over a period of six months, as well as from several questionnaires. These questionnaires covered a range of areas including preferred learning styles, study habits, a needs analysis, cognitive style, preferred modes of communication, attitudes to learning and a learner diary. These were drawn mainly from Learning Styles in Adult Migrant Education (Willing, 1985). The information on analyzing the student's language needs and progress was obtained mainly from Language Teaching Course Design: Trends and Issues (Nunan, 1985). I shall present this account of my study in 3 main sections: Biographic Information, Present Context, and Issues.

I General Biographic Information

The subject of this study, Hardjo, was a 20-year male with Indonesian citizenship. He was born in a suburb of the capital, Jakarta. However, as both of his parents were second generation Chinese immigrants, Hardjo was always regarded as Chinese, rather than Indonesian by the Indonesian authorities as well as by the majority of his social network. In spite of this, Hardjo regarded himself as Indonesian. One of the motivating factors behind his decision to come to Australia was to leave behind this identity dilemma.

Hardjo's father was a well-to-do businessman who spoke a little English, with Mandarin as his first language and Indonesian as his second. Hardjo's mother spoke no English but had Mandarin as her first language and Indonesian as her second. Consequently, it was Mandarin that was mostly spoken within the home, while Indonesian was used outside.

One of Hardjo's siblings, a sister, spoke English and had taken up residence in the United States.

Educational Background

Having just matriculated from high school a few months before arriving in Australia, Hardjo had never been employed. His education had followed a normal pattern and, though never particularly outstanding, Hardjo had never had much difficulty at school. It was in high school that he decided that he wanted to study accountancy at an Australian institution.

At primary school, English had not been taught and little time was devoted to it as a formal subject in high school. The medium of instruction for these lessons was Indonesian which, together with Mandarin, Hardjo regarded as his first language.

Hardjo did not enjoy either his English or Indonesian classes at high school. He actually received his lowest marks for any subject in Indonesian language, though he did always pass. Hardjo's disinterest in the formal study of language possibly stems from these beginnings. He complains now that some of the problems he had with Indonesian were that it wasn't spoken at home and that his friends and peers spoke either Jakartan slang, or the local language, Batawi. He didn't find English classes very useful because his teachers were Indonesians who had learnt English from their Dutch teachers. They therefore spoke English with, as Hardjo put it, "a strange Dutch-Indonesian pronunciation and accent". The major focus of his English classes was grammar or grammar-translation exercises. As Hardjo indicated to me, both in the interviews and on some of the questionnaires, he didn't like to concentrate for very long and this could provide a further explanation for his dislike of studying English.

II Present Context

Course Description - Over the period of this study, Hardjo attended full-time English classes at our centre for 2 periods of 10 weeks. On arrival at the centre, students are given an entrance test consisting of a written (structure and cloze) test and an oral interview. On completing each 10 week session, students sit for an exit test which varies in difficulty with the students' levels of proficiency. The emphasis in most classes is on cultivating the ability to communicate effectively in English and on developing learning strategies and study skills.

Affective factors - When Hardjo first arrived, his level of English expression was so low that an interpreter was necessary at his initial interview. He spent the first 10 weeks in the lowest class, consisting of 8 students, with whom he quickly made friends. Although only 2 students in the class spoke the same language, they all worked together well in class and often played sport and went to parties together outside of class time.

Hardjo was fairly quiet-spoken, but had a good, sometimes raucous, sense of humour. He enjoyed being with groups of friends, though he did have two closer friends. He seemed to be a very socially-oriented person. He respected his parents and their wishes, but at the same time he was quite worried about letting his father down. He did not seem to feel peer pressure as strongly as parental pressure. In his interviews with me, shame or embarrassment in his friends' eyes did not figure as sources of anxiety, as often as fear of his father's anger and disappointment. However, there was a distinct mismatch between the expectations of Hardjo and his father as against Hardjo's actual level of competence and improvement rate.

It was Hardjo's father's idea that he should come to Australia,

study English, do matriculation in Australia, study at an Australian university or business college and then act as an agent for the family business in Australia. Considering the minimal English phrases with which Hardjo arrived in Australia, it would seem that his father underestimated the time he would need to become proficient. Trying to live up to these expectations of his father was causing Hardjo considerable anxiety.

Recent Language Development

After three months, at the end of his first course, Hardjo barely passed the examination. His command of grammar was very weak, especially in comparison to other members of his class, and his vocabulary was still very limited. He was allowed to continue on to the second level on the grounds that his oral communication ability had increased markedly, that he worked hard in class, and that he always participated actively in class activities. He was often overheard to be making an effort to speak English with other students, though he did not often do homework tasks.

Unfortunately, Hardjo badly failed the examination at the end of the second level. The probability that he would, had been evident to all of his teachers from about the third week of his second course. Although there seemed to be several reasons for his failure, the main ones appear to have been emotional and attitudinal. Early in his second course, Hardjo seemed to realize quite suddenly that he had only jumped the first hurdle - being able to communicate fairly basically in English. Frustration at constantly being misunderstood, impatience, and the knowledge that he was still far from being able to pass the necessary matriculation examination in English all combined to dent his self-confidence and motivation. In addition, his father had started to demand results and, it seemed, was threatening to withdraw his financial

support and bring Hardjo back home to Indonesia. As his anxiety about this increased, so did the pace of his social life.

Needs Analysis -

The most revealing ifnormation about Hardjo's state of mind at this time is shown in his answers on a questionnaire on Attitudes to Learning (from Willing, 1985). Hardjo said that he enjoyed learning languages very much, which indicated his change in attitude from high school days. However, on this same questionnaire on which he claimed to understand 65-90% of the English used in class, he also felt that in 5 years' time he would only know 20% of English. Yet he wanted to have many Australian friends and become Australian. This turmoil and anxiety, together with fading self-confidence was also exhibited in my interviews with him at the time.

Another questionnaire which Hardjo completed shortly after the middle of his second course also seemed to show the source of some of his problems. This was the Functional Purpose Grid (from Willing, 1985). This was designed to determine how important English was for him and what areas he saw as being more important than others. On this he indicated that English was very important for him:

1. in shops and offices - for practical purposes
2. to be able to speak by telephone - for practical purposes
3. to speak with new Australian friends - a need he felt socially
4. to understand the news on television - another social need
5. to read stories - another personal need, and
6. to study a technical subject - his father's wish.

This response seemed to show that, for Hardjo personally, the real purposes for learning English were practical and social. His discussions with me about his responses to these questionnaires also indicated this.

Such a practical and social orientation was exhibited in his self-correction strategies and his quickness in recognizing his semantic mistakes when pointed out, correcting them, and remembering the corrections.

III Issues

This section will be divided into two sub-sections:

(a) General Proficiency and (b) Phonological Attainment.

(a) General Proficiency

(i) Listening comprehension and oral expression.

When speaking in class or with an English native speaker present, Hardjo was quite hesitant and made an effort to monitor his errors. This hesitancy alternated with bursts of fluency studded with errors. When in the presence of non-native speakers only, these bursts of fluency were more frequent than the hesitations.

Hardjo had a fair command of the simple present tense and associated time phrases, as well as other time indicators, which he often used instead of the appropriate tense or aspect markers. This reflects the structure of Indonesian, which does not have verb tenses. His competence in descriptions of daily routines, and recent events in which he had been involved, was also quite high. Prepositions were a great problem for him, again reflecting Indonesian usage. He would often use the same preposition "at" where "in" or "on" would be appropriate. This is a direct translation from Indonesian. Correct word order in sentences was also a problem for him, as were more complex verb patterns or constructions, such as the use of infinitives or gerunds in complement positions. Hardjo preferred to stay on safe ground where these were concerned and use the basic stem without "to -", or use a string of "to + verb stem". He seemed to use this strategy to give himself

time to think about what he wanted to say next or as an avoidance strategy.

His vocabulary in English was very limited, considering the variety of social situations in which he had participated. He developed his own system of expression around this limited vocabulary and used kinesic props such as facial expressions and hand and body gestures to fill in the gaps in his verbal expression. Hardjo generally managed to convey his message, but the path he took was very circuitous, relying overmuch on prediction and guessing on the part of the listener. He would also speak quite fluently and enthusiastically about events in his social life and about his hobbies and interests as in these cases, his desire to communicate and his sense of humour usually obscured the lack of structure and cohesion.

In my attempts to help him, I tried to focus on his social skills and interests in formulating my teaching strategies, and informally I directed him along the path towards self-evaluation and monitoring. I asked him to keep a diary of his interactions in which he used English (after Willing, 1985). This diary included his perceptions of which situations he found more difficult than others, why he found them so, what he felt confident about, and what he did not. Hardjo enjoyed this exercise and, in our discussions of the diary entries, we both felt that he was starting to perceive, understand and remedy his errors. I then used these diary entries and our discussions of them to monitor his progress, and as a base from which to teach him some appropriate learning strategies. The very fact that it made him more aware of the input of others and his processing of this seemed to boost his self-confidence and make him more adventurous in his own writing and speaking. In managing his classroom context, I tried to utilize the information he had given me on earlier questionnaires about his preferred modes of learning and study habits. On these questionnaires,

he had indicated that he basically liked to learn in a small, warm, supportive, non-threatening and social environment which included lots of audio and audiovisual support. I arranged classes so that all students had access to a variety of partners in role-play and discussion activities, kept the numbers in such groups to 2 or 3 participants and used audio-visual aids more frequently. Once or twice a week Hardjo and I met informally to chat about his problems and progress, and once a week we had an interview specifically aimed at reviewing and remedying his errors.

However, Hardjo's social commitments, and anxiety mentioned earlier, continued to frustrate my attempts and our meeting times often had to be changed and re-arranged to suit his other involvements. As he mixed more with other Australians, he began to use very broad "Strine" pronunciation on words he used and heard frequently. He also acquired quite a range of colloquial expressions which he often used in the most inappropriate places! Simultaneously, his listening comprehension improved and he started being able to appreciate television programmes in English and to make and receive telephone calls with some competence. Both the comments from his teachers for audio-visual classes and his final test results support this impression of improvement.

In other areas, however, there was still a vast difference between Hardjo's perception of his problems and his competence, and his teacher's perceptions of these.

(ii) Writing Skills

Hardjo's written language consistently mirrored his spoken language. In fact, his writing showed the frequency of errors he made in speaking, as his style in both mediums of expression were the same. His writing also reflected the extent to which he still translated word-for-word from Indonesian - a factor not so evident in his spoken language, as then he used and re-used the same pseudo-English phrases. There was

already evidence of some fossilization of errors in both his speaking and his writing. The samples of Hardjo's writing which I saw, ranged from letters done in class to letters to Australian friends, and from classroom essays to diary entries and forms. On the positive side, syntactically Hardjo showed a good command of simple present tense and the use of irregular verbs in the past. However, in writing activities not specifically based on the exclusive use of one tense or other, Hardjo persistently exhibited confusion in his choice between either simple present or past.

Semantically, Hardjo always managed to convey the appropriate general functional meaning in his writing while never over-stretching his writing capabilities. When something came up which he felt too challenging for his English writing skills, he always sought the help of more competent friends. Over time, Hardjo did show some learning of certain models and patterns common to some of the forms and letters which he frequently needed and practised. However, the effectiveness with which he transferred a known model to his immediate needs varied considerably with his level of attention to the task and the availability of help. Hardjo was, overall, very dependent on help from others and unselfconfident in his writing.

Hardjo's more consistent and obvious problems in writing included:

1. inability to use compound verbs i.e. confusion over the use of gerunds and infinitive constructions - overusing the infinitive.
2. overgeneralization from patterns learnt i.e. in the use of articles with certain idiomatic expressions
   eg. "... in the night" for "at night"
3. confusion over parts of speech, especially with the use of nouns as verbs and vise versa. In Indonesian, nouns and verbs have distinctive prefixes and suffixes making such confusion almost impossible.

4. lack of understanding of appropriacy of different genre and lack of control over genre

   i.e. prolific use of informal, colloquial expressions in formal, written genre.

5. direct and inappropriate translation from Indonesian, with occasional lapses into Indonesian - also evident in speech.

6. inappropriate choices of preposition - also reflecting translation

7. numerous spelling errors derived from mispronunciation

   eg. (in an essay entitled "My activities yesterday".)

than	for then
teach	for teeth
studing	for studying
lanch	for lunch
hose	for house
bag	for back
bad	for bed.

   and from an account of a party:

jung food	for junk food
though	for thought
comportable	for comfortable
think	for things.

8. punctuation omissions

   eg. commas and periods with overgeneralized use of the apostrophe

   eg. Thank's
   Shoul'd

9. general tendency for his need to communicate and for his social involvement to overwhelm the desire for language accuracy.

10. limited vocabulary

11. misuse of new words/expressions, becoming fossilized in his inter-language through writing and repetition.

Because of his adventurous and imaginative mind, Hardjo continually tried to use the new words and expressions and more complex structures he heard. However, as his vocabulary expanded, the number of errors increased. While this is a commonly recognized phenomenon, Hardjo's social nature and his field-dependent cognitive style seemed to contribute to the fossilization of these problems and errors.

(iii) Reading Skills

In reading classes, Hardjo seemed to employ two main strategies: either he read to comprehend, taking longer than most other class members in so doing, or he read to keep pace with the class, consequently missing even some of the main points. When reading and using substitution tables, his performance was slow and erratic, producing writing which was full of errors.

He was always a willing participant in classroom reading or writing exercises, but was often slow to start and finish, or he misunderstood the exercise instructions. Outside the classroom, Hardjo was reluctant to use written English in situations such as form-filling, probably because of his frequent misunderstanding of instructions and his lack of confidence.

(b) Phonological Attainment

My conclusions and observations in this section are derived from an analysis of tapescripts of Hardjo's speech recorded in class, as well as from the numerous interviews I had with him.

In general, Hardjo was fairly easy to understand in a social situation, in which prediction on the part of the listener played an important part. However, when Hardjo was trying to express his worries or give an account of what was troubling him, that is, when he was speaking about a topic unfamiliar to the listener, he could be very difficult to understand.

In terms of pronunciation, all of Hardjo's mistakes are consistent with sounds that either do not exist in Indonesian, or are pronounced slightly differently in that language. The following summary outlines Hardjo's pronunciation of English sounds that are not found in Indonesian:

I. Hardjo pronounced the English vowels

(i) æ as eg. bæk becomes bʌk

(ii) ɛ as midway between ɛ and æ eg. ðɛn becomes ðɛæn

and (iii) i as i: eg. ʃip becomes ʃi:p

II Hardjo pronounced the English dipthongs

(i) aw as ʌ-ʊ eg. haws becomes hʌ-us

and (ii) ei as ɔi eg. dei becomes dɔi (this one seems to represent Hardjo's attempt at the Australian "Strine" pronunciation.

III Hardjo pronounced the consonants

(i) g & k as the same k sound eg. both dɔg and dɔk become dɔk, with no voicing

(ii) ð as d eg. ðə becomes də

(iii) θ as t^h eg. θɪn becomes t^h in (refer I (iii) above)

(iv) f as p eg. kʌmf-təbəl becomes kʌmptəbəl

(v) l as a more liquid sound

(vi) r as a rolled sound in initial and median positions, but especially in terminal position.

In addition, Hardjo dropped or swallowed d,t and k in final position. This is also consistent with Indonesian pronunciation. In many of the examples I have just given, Hardjo's difficulties were caused mainly by the actual mechanics involved in the production of the appropriate sounds, as with ð, for example. His mouth was simply unaccustomed to forming such sounds. On the other hand, consonants such as θ, l and r, the dipthong

aw and the vowel ɛ are quite familiar to sounds that exist in Indonesian and the fine distinction eluded him. In the case of the vowels æ and ɛ, Hardjo claimed not to perceive the distinction when listening.

Hardjo's familiarity with Mandarin, and especially its tonal quality, seems to have had a detrimental effect on his acquisition of English stress, rhythm and intonation patterns. This was also true of his spoken Indonesian as he was sometimes misconstrued as being abrupt or curt in that language, without his intending to be so. Hardjo was quick to perceive the difference in intonation and stress when his pattern and the correct pattern were presented to him consecutively and he seemed to be able to mimic the correct pattern immediately. Unfortunately, when he was concentrating on other features, he tended to lapse into the older, more familiar patterns.

Summary of the Situation and Findings

Overall, Hardjo seemed to be a fairly socially-oriented, concrete or field-dependent learner (Witkin et al 1977). His language learning benefited most from supportive, practically-directed situations where the communication necessary was developed very slowly. He seemed to require the teacher to monitor closely the language material presented to him and his production of language. He seemed to learn best in social contexts, or classroom role-play activities which simulated these. However, he needed to have time to assimilate new material at his own pace, and to reinforce his learning of this material through teacher-controlled or teacher-monitored communicative activities. Without such monitoring, Hardjo fossilized incorrectly-used or inappropriately-used expressions in his production of language.

In terms of his final English proficiency assessment, Hardjo himself decided, against his father's wishes, not to enrol at a university. In

this way he avoided having to sit for the Australian Government proficiency test. In view of Hardjo's performance on this kind of test in the past, this was probably a sensible decision. His responses to the questionnaires on study habits and learning style preferences also indicated that he would learn English more quickly in a practical area, or in a field which interested him. Subsequently Hardjo enrolled in a Business English bridging course. Once there, he began to realize that in order to make progress, he had to take the initiative himself and set himself realistic and practical goals. His moodiness and frustration have since begun to pass and there has been a marked increase in the amount of study he does at home and in the work he does on his own, with recorded material from the business and commerce field. While it is doubtful that Hardjo will ever achieve native-speaker proficiency in English, it does seem that he will be able to communicate adequately in the business field and make progress in these studies.

NOTE

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